

Family Stories & Photos

William B. DeMik Family



(Standing) Julius (Jule), William (Bill), Garret, John
(Seated) Clara, Elizabeth, William B.

What's in a Name

The name *DeMik* has two parts: the prefix *de* and the surname *Mik*. In the Dutch language, *de* means *the*, however, there is no word in English to correspond to *Mik*. We believe *Mik* is a diminutive form, or nickname, for the given name *Michael*, which the Dutch pronounce *MIK*. The spelling of the name and the use of a space - or no space - between the prefix and surname varies considerably in DeMik family records to include *DeMik*, *De Mik*, *Demik*, *de Mik*, and *Mik*. For the sake of consistency we chose to use the spelling and spacing from the paragraph below as it appeared in William B. DeMik's will.*

SECOND; After the payment of such funeral expenses and debts, I give, devise and bequeath unto my children John DeMik, Elizabeth Romein, Garret DeMik, Julius DeMik and William DeMik, share and share alike all my estate real personal and mixed of whatsoever kind and nature, I may die possessed, to them and their heirs forever, except the sum of Five Dollars which I give to my wife Jacoba DeMik; I consider she has received from my property in money more than her just and legal share prior to her desertion of me in 1926, and I charge it against her.

* Illinois Probate & Will Records; Illinois, County Court (Kankakee County); Kankakee, Illinois. Will Records, Vol. 7 1918-1928, Image 170. Found at: <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/2331698:9048>

While the paragraph above clarifies the issue of how to spell our family name, it raises another issue: *Who was Jacoba DeMik and why was she identified as William's wife?*



Who Was Jacoba DeMik?

Jacoba DeMik was William DeMik's second wife. Her photo (left) was not with DeMik family photos; however, we obtained it from a family tree posted online. Jacoba is listed as William's wife in his will and death certificate.

If married, widowed or divorced
HUSBAND of
(or) WIFE of

Jacoba DeMik

See copy of William's death certificate
in the Family Records folder.

We are unaware of family stories regarding Jacoba, so we must look at facts to see if we can reveal the mystery of her identity. We know that William DeMik and his wife Clara were married in Roseland, Chicago, Illinois, where they raised five children, including Elizabeth (DeMik) Romein. We also know they moved to a farm in Wichert in 1914 and they both passed away in Wichert, Clara in 1919 and William in 1926. They are buried side by side in the Oakwood Cemetery.

Jacoba was born to Arjen and Ytje Tolsma on February 26, 1862 in Leeuwarden, Friesland, in the Netherlands. The Tolsmas immigrated to America in 1882 and settled in Roseland. Jacoba married Rinze Hoffman on May 18, 1882 in Roseland and they raised seven children. Rinze died on December 30, 1917 and Jacoba married William DeMik on October 18, 1922 in Roseland. Since Jacoba is identified as William's wife on his will and death certificate, we know they didn't divorce. Jacoba's last name was Westerhout when she passed away on December 20, 1942 in Roseland.

The only personal detail we know is that William left Jacoba the *sum of \$5.00* in his will because she had taken more money than her *just and legal share* from him before she *deserted him in 1926*. Perhaps this shameful act is the reason there are no DeMik family stories or photos of Jacoba DeMik.



William B. DeMik

William Boom DeMik was a twin. He and his sister Dingema were born July 13, 1861, in Hoornaar, Zuid-Holland, in the Netherlands. Dingema died shortly after their birth, on October 20, 1861, in Hoornaar.

When William lived in Chicago, he worked for a time for the Pullman Company which produced railroad sleeper cars. In 1894, the owner of the company incurred the wrath of his workers when he laid off hundreds and cut the wages of many others. A large faction of workers went on strike to protest and, at one point, an angry mob destroyed

hundreds of railroad cars. National guardsmen called in to quell the violence fired into the mob, killing 30 people and injuring many more.

William believed it was wrong for the workers to strike and to resort to violence as a means to redress their grievances. His convictions placed him in a perilous position when he refused to honor the strike. Because his life was in danger, armed guards escorted him as he bravely crossed the picket lines and returned to work.



John DeMik

John DeMik, the oldest of the DeMik siblings, had a difficult time providing for his young children following the tragic death of Sophia, his first wife. In her final letter to her mother, Sophia wrote: "We are in the best of health and hope the same for you folks... (w)e are all feeling happy with the good news of peace [the end of WWI]. Whistles have blown since early this morning."

Happiness for this family, however, ended when Sophia passed away a month later, on December 17, 1918, stricken with the flu in the 1918 influenza pandemic. John was unable to care for their five children so they were taken in by their grandparents, William and Clara DeMik, who lived on a ten-acre farm in Wichert. After Clara died in 1919, William could not care for the children, so John placed them with other relatives. Harold, who was fifteen months old, was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Dekker of Roseland, Illinois. The Dekkers subsequently moved to Grand Rapids,

Michigan where Harold graduated from seminary, married, and made a life for himself. Eventually, Harold's adoptive parents revealed the identity of his natural parents and Harold immediately made arrangements to meet his father and siblings.





Julius (Jule) DeMik

Second to the youngest of the DeMik siblings, Jule possessed a sense of adventure that led him to move to Wichert on his own when he was only 16 years old to work on a farm. He also served as a private in the United States Army from June 24, 1918 to July 4, 1919.

Because of his natural bent toward being independent, he appeared to be carefree; however, he suffered from nervous tension most of his life. Over a period of time, he developed several ulcers that had to be removed, leaving him with only a small portion of his stomach.



William (Bill) DeMik

Bill, the youngest DeMik sibling, was a Private First Class in the United States Marine Corps in World War I. As a machine gunner, he was involved in fierce combat from trenches in close proximity to the enemy. He watched men fall and heard their screams as they died in front of him.

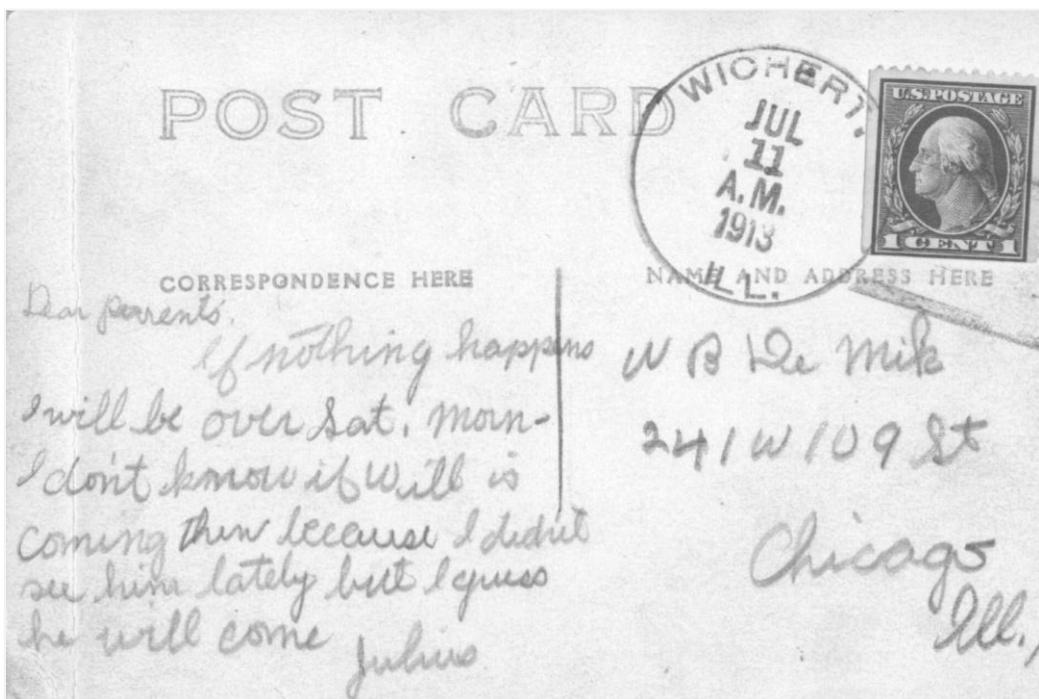
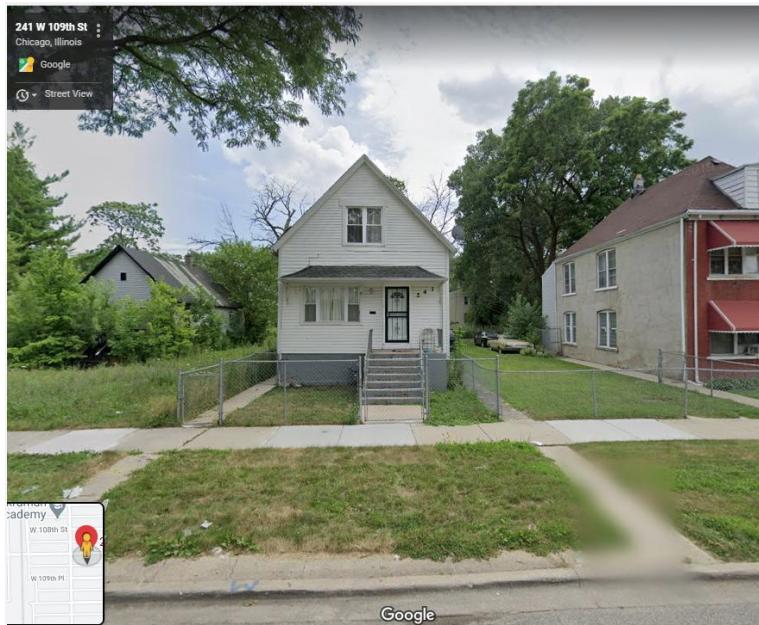
He was wounded in the Battle of Belleau Wood in France in 1918 and injured in a chemical gas attack. In addition, he suffered an emotional blow when he received a *Dear John* letter from his fiancé back home. Bill never completely recovered from the physical and psychological wounds he sustained in the war and he spent time in a Veterans Hospital in Danville, Illinois. He didn't marry and he lived for a time with his brother Garret and sister-in-law Cora in New Jersey and Florida. Fortunately, Bill was able to carry on his profession as a commercial artist. He is buried in Section 17, Site 1845, in the National Cemetery in Danville.

Bill (kneeling, second right) with his gun crew in Rheinbrohl, Germany, May, 1919



What a Difference a Century Can Make

Before they moved to Wichert, William and Clara DeMik lived in a beautiful home in Roseland, Chicago, IL (below, left). A search on Google Maps shows the house as it appears today, a century later (below, right). It would be difficult to believe the same house appears in both photos, except for one thing. Julius DeMik sent a postcard to William and Clara, his parents, on July 11, 1913 (bottom of page). The address on the postcard is 241 W 109th St., which is the address displayed in the search box at the upper left corner of the Google Maps screen. Are the houses *really* the same one with major structural changes? Probably, but it's doubtful we will ever know for certain.



John & Margret (Maggie) DeMik; Gerrit & Clazina Vanderlee

Elizabeth's paternal grandparents, John & Margret (Maggie) DeMik, and maternal grandfather and step-grandmother, Gerrit & Clazina Vanderlee, are buried in unmarked graves in Mount Greenwood Cemetery in Roseland, Chicago, Illinois. Family lore has it both sets of grandparents were too poor to be able to purchase grave markers.



John DeMik



Margret (Maggie) DeMik



Gerrit Vanderlee